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Male and Female Differences in Colour Naming, A Case Study of FIB UI English Students

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Abstract

Male and female are not only differentiated by their physical and emotional condition. There are many other aspects that can be explained to prove male and female differences, one of those differences can be seen by how they name colour. Using Lakoff's theory, which talks about female and male differences in colour naming, as the main theory, this research is conducted. Using ten FIB UI English students as the sample, five males and five females, this research aims to prove Lakoff's theory whether it is suitable with the condition of FIB UI English students or not. Besides, by the end of this research, readers can find some other aspects which can affect one's colour vocabulary besides gender differences. At the end of the research, I can say that Lakoff's theory about female and male differences in colour naming is more or less similar with the condition of FIB UI English students.

INTRODUCTION

Language is an essential part of human's life. We need language to communicate with one another. Besides, we also need language to express our opinion about any phenomenon in this world. Regarding its function, we have to realize that learning a language is very important. Besides being used for communication, language is also important because it can affect culture. According to Whorf's hypothesis (cited in Johnstone, 2002, p.33) language can affect culture, although up until now it is still unclear whether language affects culture or the other way around. Another thing that we should realize is that language can shape a social reality. One of the social constructions which is an impact of language is the gender concept.

Whether we realize it or not, gender differences give a huge impact to the language differences. By language differences here, I do not mean a language that we use, but rather to the way we speak. If we take a look at the language which is used by male and female, we will realize that there are some differences in the way they communicate. The differences can be seen both in verbal and nonverbal language. As an example, in responding to a story, female and male have a difference in giving small responses like nodding or saying "yes" or no". For female, by nodding they want to show that they

listen to the story carefully and want the story teller to continue the story. Whereas for male, nodding only means that they agree with the story, therefore, they only nod once or twice while listening to a story (Weatherall, 2005, p.70). Those small differences can lead to misunderstanding when male and female communicate. The difference between male and female language is not only in responding to a story, but also in the way they speak. One of those differences is the main topic that will be discussed in this paper, which is the difference in naming colour between male and female.

The theory of gender and language has been proposed by many experts, for example Otto Jaspersen, William Labov, and Robin Lakoff. This paper focuses on a theory which was proposed by Robin Lakoff on gender differences on speech style. The theory of Lakoff had been rewritten in Weatherall's book titled *Gender, language, and discourse*. In her book, Weatherall mentioned some differences between male and female speech style. The differences can be found at every level of English, like phonology, semantic, morphology, and also lexical level. "At the lexical level she suggested that women use more precise colour descriptors...." (Weatherall, 2005, p.58).

Lakoff's theory is also rewritten in a paper entitled Characteristics of the language of women in English by Qiuling Bi. Bi (2010) writes something interesting in her paper. In this paper, Bi writes some characteristics of women language, one of those is specialized vocabulary. Specialized vocabulary means that there are some vocabulary that is usually only used by female instead of male, for instance, the use of nicknames. Besides the use of nickname, Bi mentions one of specialized vocabulary that women have, which is colour words. "Women are sensitive in colours. They are good at using colour words by describing colours, like chartreuse, beige, lavender, mauve, azure, and so on." (Bi, 2010, p.2). By looking at those two previous researches, it is clear that male and female have some differences in speech style, especially the choice of words.

However, the gendered-linked in colour naming are rarely researched. There are only few previous researches which exactly talk about the same topic of my research. Still from the same paper entitled Characteristics of the language of women in English, Bi writes that there was a research about colour naming across gender. The research used twenty colour boards and asked the students to write the name of each colour. The result of this research was that female students can name 71% of the colours while men only answer 46% of the colours (Bi, 2010, p.2). This research supports Lakoff's theory which said that women have more precise colour descriptors than men do.

Another interesting research that can support Lakoff's theory and will help me to do this research is a paper entitled Are colours special? An examination of the female advantage for speeded colour naming by Deborah M Saucier, Lorin J Elias, and Kirk Nylen (2002). By conducting a research with 44 students as its sample, they found that women are faster than men in colour naming. There are some possible explanations of this result, but the most common explanation is the one related to Lakoff's theory. "There

are numbers of possible explanations for the sex effect. The most common explanation is that females are superior at speeded colour naming because they have larger colour lexicons than males." (Saucier, Elias & Nylen, 2002:28). It means that the speed of women in colour naming is also determined and related to their colour vocabulary which is much more than men.

In Turkey, a research in colour naming had also been conducted. However, this one is not related to gender at all. This journal paper tried to relate colour naming in Turkish with jobs, age, and other social aspects. The writers believe that colour vocabulary of a person is also determined by some social aspects like gender, age, jobs, and so on. Therefore, they include those social aspects to be observed. "For each colour term, the effect of age, gender, occupation and the city of residence on colour naming were also examined." (Ekici, Yener & Camgöz, 2005, p.466).

Talking about other social aspects which can affect one's colour words, we have to consider what language they are familiar with, because a language can also determine one's colour words since each language has its own colour vocabulary system. Malindra (2011) quoted a result of Berlin and Kay's research, from Keraf (1990), which said that there are eight categories of colour vocabulary systems and English is the language which has a lot of terms of colours, it is around eight or nine terms. Therefore, vocabulary of colours in English is much more than in other languages, for instance Bahasa Indonesia. Thus, people who are familiar with English have a great possibility to have more colour terms than those who are not.

It is interesting to see how gender concept can differentiate many aspects, including colour terms. If we previously saw colour as a simple thing, by the end of this research we realize that even a simple thing like colour can be an indicator of male and female speech style differences. The main objective of this paper is to prove whether Lakoff's theory about gender and colour naming can be applied to FIB UI English students or not. To reach its objective, I conduct a research by spreading questionnaire to twenty FIB UI English students, ten males and ten females, randomly. Considering that English students are quite familiar with English, which has many colour vocabulary systems, I choose them as my respondents. The respondents are asked to answer some questions and name some similar colours. Before answering the questions, I give them colour blind test, to make sure that the respondents are not colour blind. Besides to prove Lakoff's theory, another aim of this research is to figure out if there is any other aspect that can affect how female and male name colour. Here, I relate colour naming not only to gender but also to other social aspects to see whether there are other aspects that will affect one's colour vocabulary besides male and female speech style differences.

ANALYSIS

There is one well-known saying to differentiate male and female, "Male is from Mars and female is from Venus." This saying is actually used to describe many differences between male and female as human beings. Many experts believe that male and female differences, especially in speech style, are determined by their society. The way female and male should interact is has been taught since we were child. If we take a look at female and male speech style, we will realize that it is actually a reflection of their social status. Lakoff once said "Differences in women's and men's speech is reflecting their status differences in society" (Holmes, 2001, p.76). To identify the meaning of Lakoff's saying, let us see one of the female speech styles, also from Lakoff's theory,

> *Some fifty years later, Lakoff's (1973, 1975) `Language and Woman's Place' also described a distinctive woman's speech style that conveyed weakness, uncertainty and unimportance. In her analysis Lakoff clearly considered women's language to be inferior to men's language, which she described as direct, clear and succinct.*

(Weatherall, 2002, pp.56-57)

If we see from that quotation, we know that female speech style is considered as weak, uncertain, and unimportant, whereas, male's is direct, clear, and succinct. This style makes female is seen as inferior and male is the superior one. This also happens in patriarchal society where female is seen as more inferior than male. It means that language is not only used to communicate but also to define one's identity and power in society.

Besides to use for defining one's identity and power, language and speech style differences also can define colours. Colours are always related to human's life and it is also related with gender concept. Since we were child, we already got a concept that a particular colour is for male and another colour is for female, for instance blue is for male colour and pink is for female. We can take a newborn baby as an example. Usually, if the baby is a boy, people tend to give him everything blue, while if the baby is a girl people will give her pink gifts. Actually, this is not only a habit because some research has already proved this. Elis and Ficek (2001) are two researchers who discuss colour preferences among gender. This paper shows that male usually prefer blue-ish colour to red-ish one, and female is the other way around. The relationship between colour and gender concept is not only in colour preferences but also in colour naming.

The theory of colour naming differences among gender was proposed by an American linguist, Robin Lakoff. Lakoff (cited in Holmes, 2001, p.286) said that at least there are ten major differences of female and male speech style, they are:

1. Women use more hedges (well, kind of, sort of)
2. Women use more super polite forms (Will you…?; Would you mind if….?)
3. Women use more tag questions than men (You will go to the mall, won't you?)

4. Women use more empty adjective (lovely, divine, adorable)
5. Women use more precise grammar
6. Both men and women have their special lexicon (women: colours; men: sports)
7. Women use more intensifiers
8. Women use raising intonation to ask question
9. Women use more "WH-" imperatives
10. Women use more indirect commands and requests

This paper focuses on point sixth. It is said that both female and male have their own special lexicon. Female is usually good at naming colour while male is usually good at naming everything related with sport. Although this theory cannot be applied in every condition and situation, some research has proved this theory.

As I have said above, this theory cannot be applied in all conditions. There are some exceptions for some cases. It means that the colour naming differences is not only determined by gender differences but there are some factors that can affect one's colour vocabulary, for example social and cultural factors. Hobbies and jobs are two of many factors that can affect colour vocabulary (Ekici, Yener, Camgöz, 2005). For example, a person whose hobbies are something related with colours, like painting and designing, tends to have more colour terms than they whose hobbies are not. It also happens on job, they whose jobs are related with colours, such as painter and designer (any type of designer, fashion, interior, and so on), also tend to have more colour terms than they whose jobs are not related with colours. Therefore, social factors are also counted on to analyze colour naming differences between male and female.

After talking about gender concept, now let us move on to colour terms. Colour naming is a field which combines colours and linguistics perspective. Every day we see colours, but can we mention all of their names? "Although we can distinguish million colours visually, only few of them have special names," (Plumacher, 2007, p.61). Usually, a colour is named by an object which has a particular colour and that object is already familiar in the society, for example in Bahasa Indonesia we know a term *merah darah*. *Merah* means red and *darah* means blood, so *merah darah* refers to red colour which is similar to the colour of blood. In English, we have navy blue which refers to blue colour and it is like a navy uniform.

We have been taught since we were a child that to name a colour we have to relate it with other object. "That is, color is an inherent property of objects as, for example, with an orange, a tree, a flower, a rock, a stretch of open ground," (Wyler, 2007, p.114). Colour is not only related to regular object but also related to nature. "Colors, as the human eye perceives them, are inherent properties of nature: snow is white, grass is green, a donkey is gray," (Wyler, 2007, p.115). It means that nature condition will also affect one's colour vocabulary. For example, in a country which has winter season, the people there will

have some colour terms which are related to snow. Those who live in tropical country will have more green colour terms since their environment is surrounded by tree, grass, and other green natural objects. However in some cases, people often use the word "light" and "dark" to explain a colour rather than using a specific name.

Every language in this world has different colour vocabulary terms. There is a language which only has two colour vocabulary terms and there is also a language which has more than seven colour vocabulary terms. Here is a table of colour vocabulary terms in some languages from a research conducted by Berlin and Kay (cited in Malindra, 2011, p.2):

Type	Word Amount	List of Colour Vocabulary System	Language
1	2	Black, white	Jale (New Guinea)
2	3	Black, white, red	Tiv (Niger)
3	4	Black, white, red, green	Hanunoo (The Philliphines)
4	4	Black, red, white, yellow	Ibo (Niger)
5	5	Black, white, red, green, yellow	Tzeltal (Mexico)
6	6	Black, white, red, green, yellow, blue	Tamil and Indonesia
7	7	Black, white, red, green, yellow, blue, brown	Nez Perce, Indian (Northern America)
8	8/9	Black, white, red, green, yellow, blue, brown, purple, and/or pink, and/or orange, and/or gray	English

By looking at that table we can conclude that English colour vocabulary system is the most complicated compare to other languages. This complicated vocabulary system causes English has much more colours vocabulary than other languages have. Although it is quite complicated to analyze language with many colours vocabulary, it is interesting to see how female and male use that colours vocabulary. Is it true that female has more colours vocabulary than male does? To prove it, I have spread questionnaires to several FIB UI English students. Although I only take ten students as the samples, five males and five females, I spread around 16 questionnaires just in case of irrelevant answers.

There are seven numbers of questions in the questionnaire. Since it was randomly spread, I did not ask respondent's name, they only needed to put their sex and their age there. Question number one to five are related to social aspect, like hobby. As mentioned in the introduction part, I will relate colour naming not only to gender but also to social aspects, like job and hobby. Yet, because all of the respondents of FIB UI English students, I do not ask about their job anymore.

The first two questions are about respondent's preference toward English and Bahasa Indonesia. Since English has more colour vocabulary system, I believe that

they who are close with English have more colour vocabulary than they who are not. Therefore, I put these two yes-or-no questions. The first two questions are:

1. Which one do you like?
   a. Indonesian movies
   b. Western movies (in English)
2. Which one do you like?
   a. Indonesian readings (novels, magazines, etc)
   b. Western readings (novels, magazines, etc, in English)

The next questions are more specific to the hobby which is related to colour. Here, I ask them whether they have any hobby related to colour or not. Besides, I also ask if they have any special interest in fashion and cosmetic things or not. The next three questions are:

3. Are you interested in painting and designing?
   a. Yes
   b. No
4. Are you interested in fashion and cosmetic things?
   a. Yes
   b. No
5. Do you have any hobby related to colors?
   a. Yes
   For example:
   b. No

In question number three I specifically write painting and designing because those two activities are mostly related to colour. Thus, I believe people who love to paint and design will have more colour terms than people who are not really attached to those activities. Perhaps some people will ask why I put fashion and cosmetic in the questionnaire. The reason why I choose fashion and cosmetic as consideration is because fashion and cosmetic things have more specific colours. For example, fashion designer will know many colour terms and when someone often buys make-up, like lipstick or eye shadow, s/he will know many colour terms since usually cosmetic has various colours which are similar one another. In his paper, Wyler said "The textile industry, and the producers of cosmetics, lipsticks in particular, need more color designations than, say, twenty or thirty easily available color names in order to verbally specify the different shades and mixtures of colors which are characteristic of their products," (Wyler, 2007, p.117). Therefore, people who are interested in fashion and cosmetic things have to differentiate many similar colours and it will affect their colour vocabulary. The fifth question is asked to make sure if there are other hobbies which are related to colour

besides painting, designing, and fashion-cosmetic things. For question number five, the answers are varied and different one another.

Question number six is asked to make sure that the respondents are not colour blind. In the questionnaire, I give three pictures of simple colour blind test which are taken from online source. If a respondent cannot answer it correctly, I do not count his/her questionnaire because it means that the answer is not relevant. Here is the colour blind test which is asked in question number six.

6. Write down what you see below
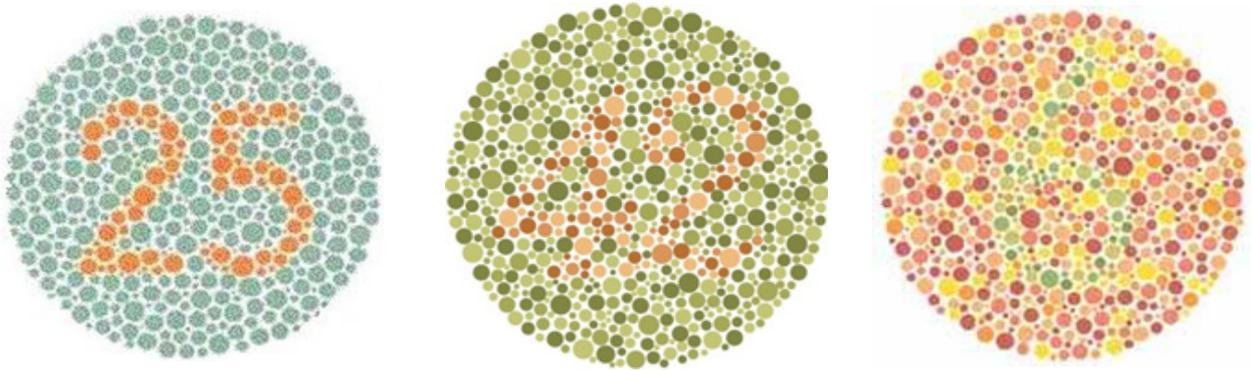
If the respondents can write down the three numbers they see above correctly, it means that they are not colour blind, so the questionnaire is counted in. However, if the answer is incorrect, I put the questionnaire aside and take another questionnaire. It is common to get irrelevant sample when we do an ethnographic research. That is why I spread more than ten questionnaires although I only need ten samples.

The last question is the main question. In question number seven, I put three similar colours in one group, and there are three groups of colour which means there are nine colours. Here is the seventh question:

1. Name the colours below

....
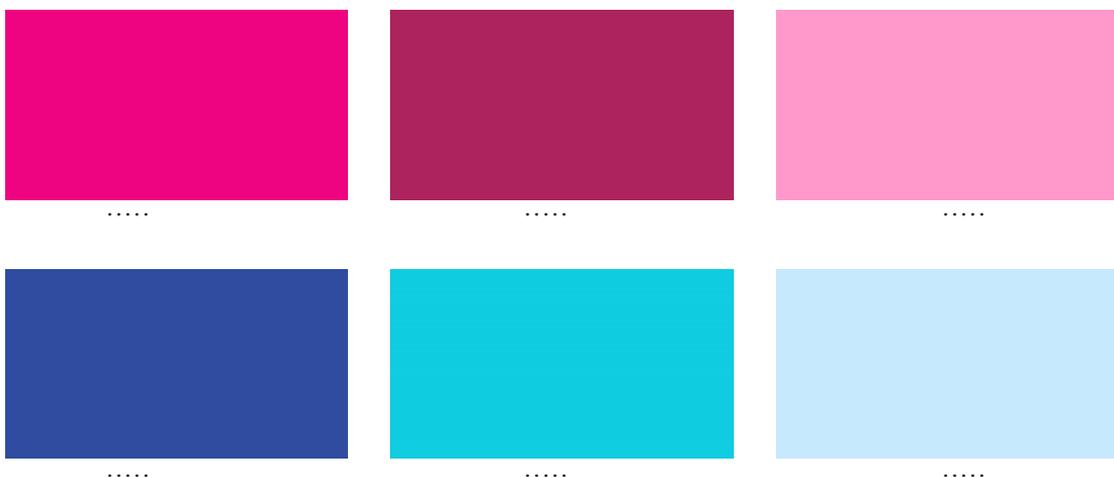
Those are the nine colours that the respondents have to name. As we can see, the colours in one group are similar one another. If the respondents do not have enough colour specification, they will only give "light" or "dark" before the primary colour. The aim of this question is not to find the one who give the most correct name to each colour but to find the one who has more colour vocabulary than others. So, the correctness of colour name is not really concerned. Also, in this question I do not give any choice to help respondents in naming the colours. I do not use the multiple choice question to get various answers from respondents. If I give multiple-choice question, the answer will be limited and monotone because the answer is already given. By giving these fill-in-the-blank questions, I am looking for various answers since there are many colour vocabulary to differentiate similar colours one another.

From the questionnaires I have spread, I got various answers although all of the respondents are FIB UI English students. These various answers are determined by many aspects, not only by their educational background, but also social, cultural, and gender aspect. Here, I spread around sixteen questionnaires in case there are some invalid questionnaires. The characteristic of invalid questionnaire, such as the respondent is colour blind. Since this etnographic research is related to colour, so the respondent who is colour blind cannot answer the question correctly. Therefore, I spread it to more than ten people to avoid getting the invalid answer. If I spread sixteen questionnaires and some of them are invalid, I still get some questionnaires which are valid.

I randomly spread the questionnaires to FIB UI English students of year 2010. I spread the questionnaires by using e-mail for time efficiency. This method is also effective enough because I do not send the questionnaire to some people that I know s/he is a colour blind. From the questionnaires I have spread, there are four male respondents who say yes for question number one and only one respondent answer no for number one. It means that the percentage of male respondents prefer western to Indonesian movies is approximately 90%. How about the female respondent? Does it have the same number with male respondent? For female, all of those five female respondents choose yes for question number one. In other word, 100% of female respondents prefer to watch western to Indonesian movies. Here we can see a little difference between female and male in term of movie preference.

For question number two which asks about reading preference, the answers are quite different from number one. In question number one, all of female respondents

choose A, while in question number two, there are only three respondents say yes and the other three say no. Meanwhile, the number of male respondent choosing yes for this question is more decreasing. If there are only four male respondents choose yes for question number one, in question number two, only three male respondents prefer to read western readings to Indonesian readings. From the answers we can conclude that, for respondents, to read any reading in English is still not too interesting. Although the educational background of all of the respondents is English Department, which forces the students to used to read any literary works in English, the rate of English readings preference is still low. This might happen because the respondents are all Indonesians, so they prefer Indonesian readings to English.

From the result of this question, we can also conclude that movie and reading are two very different activities. Although both use English as their language, movie is more interesting than reading for some Indonesians. It might happen because movie uses visual object to help viewers understand the message of it, while book mostly full of word with only a little illustration. So, it will be boring and more difficult to read a book or magazine with our non-native language. That can be a possible reason why the respondents, although they are English students, are more interested to Indonesian readings than English one. Later, we will see whether this reading preferences will affect their colour vocabulary or not.

In question number three, I ask whether the respondents are interested to painting or designing activities or not. This question is really helpful to analyze this research because those two activities are related to colour. The answers for this question for male and female are the same. There is only one male and one female choose yes for this question. Later, we will see if the answers of this question will affect the color vocabulary of the respondents or not. For question number four which asks about respondents' interests to fashion and cosmetic thing, the answers from male and female are very different. For female respondents, there are four people who say that they are familiar with fashion and cosmetic things. However, none of male respondent says that they are familiar with fashion and cosmetic things. For me, it is clear why female almost all of female respondents choose yes for this question while none of male respondent says yes. As we know, female is usually more aware to those two things than male. That is why 90% of female respondents choose yes and 0% of male respondent choose no.

The answers for question number five, which asks about any ther hobby related to colour, is not really satisfying. I actually hope that the answer for this question is various. However, most of the respondents say that they do not have any hobby related to colour. Only one respondent, male one, who say that he has another hobby related to colour besides those which I have already mentioned in the previous questions (painting, designing, fashion, and cosmetics things). This particular respondent says that his hobby is collecting sneakers. Actually collecting sneakers for me is not very related to colour,

if it is compared to painting, designing, and cosmetics-fashion things, because as I know sneakers do not have much specific colour like cosmetics, for example. Besides, sneakers usually do not have specific colour name for its products like cosmetics or fashion things have. However, it is still related to colour because when you collect sneakers, you will have to differentiate each colour. Often, some of those sneakers have very similar colour. That is why I still consider collecting sneakers as a hobby related to colour.

The result of question number five is very satisfying. As I said, this question is kind of verification question to decide whether the questionnaire will be considerable or not. By putting this color blind test I will get the information that the respondents answer the next question correctly or not. From this answer, I conclude that 100% of all the respondents are free from colour blind. It means, all of the questionnaires I have spread are considerable.

The last question is the main question one. It is divided into three parts, which I say as three groups of colour. These three groups are divided according to its similarity one another. The first colour group is those colours in pink to purple similar colour. As we can see, the colours are very similar. I intentionally put those three similar colour to see respondents reaction toward those colours. By putting very similar colours, we will see whether the respondents have enough vocabulary to define each colour or not. Actually those three colours are magenta, fuschia, and pink. Those colours are taken from Colour Safe Pallette in Adobe Photoshop application.

The result that I get from the first colour group is around 60% of male respondents tend to use "light" or "dark" to define the colour. For example, for fuschia, they tend to write dark pink instead of using the specific colour name. The rest of the male respondents, around 40%, have already written more specific colour name like violet, fuschia, or magenta, even though some of the anwers are incorrect. At least, they have more specific colour name than the other 60%. On the other hand, 70% of female respondents have mentioned more specific color name for first colour group. Some of those 70% also name the colour correctly. The rest of the female respondent, it means 30%, still use "dark" or "light" word to define colour that they do not know the name specifically. If the result is written into a chart, it will be like this:
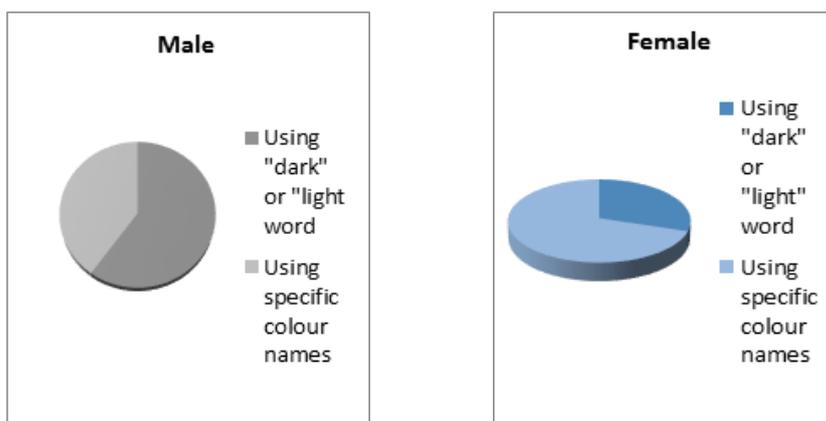
Now, we move on to the second colour groups. This colour group includes those blue-ish colours. The correct name of the colours are navy blue, turquoise, and baby blue. Again, it is taken from Colour Safe Pallette in Adobe Photoshop application. The result of this question is more or less the same with the first colour group question. Most of male respondents, around 80%, use "dark" and "light" to modify the colour names, like dark blue, or light blue. The other 20% name the colour with specific names. Also similar with the first colour group, 60% of female respondents name the colour with more specific name. The rest of female respondents do the same thing as the 80% of male respondents, which is using "dark" or "light" to define each colours. The difference between this colour group and the previous one is in this group, most of respondents name the colour correctly as it is named in Adobe Photoshop. If in the first group the percentage of respondents name the colour correctly is only 40%, in the second group, the percentage is more than 80%. It means that blue-ish colours are more familiar to the respondents than the colours in the first group. The chart of this group is drawn below:
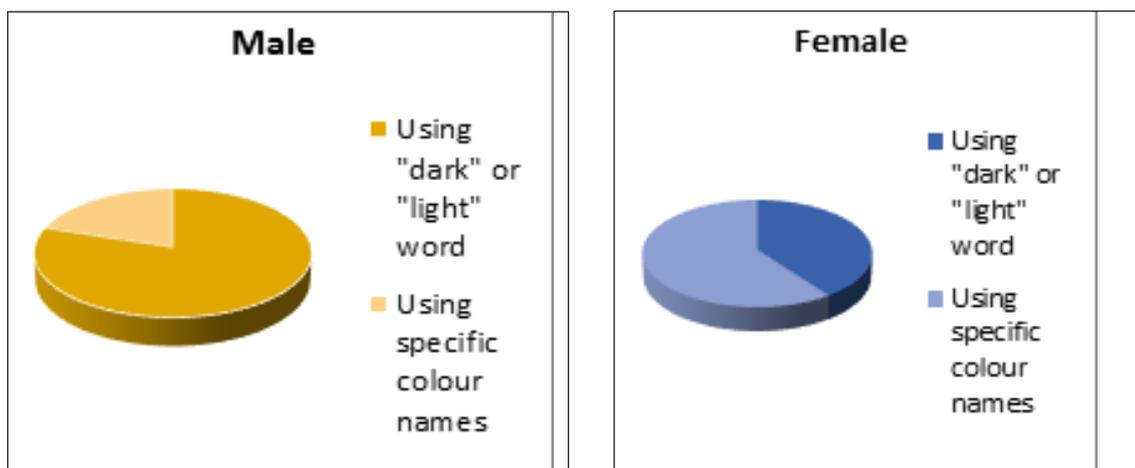
Now we move to the last colour group. The last colour group is those red-ish to brown-ish colours. According to the Colour Safe Pallette in Adobe Photoshop, those three colours are red, maroon, and brown. Again, the result that I get from the third colour group is similar with the two previous one. Around 70% of male respondents do not have enough colour vocabulary to define the colour. That is why they tend to name the colour by adding "dark" or "light" word after the basic colour name. For female respondents, 80% of them name the colour by using the correct and specific colour name like what is named in Adobe. Here is the chart to draw the result for the third colour group:
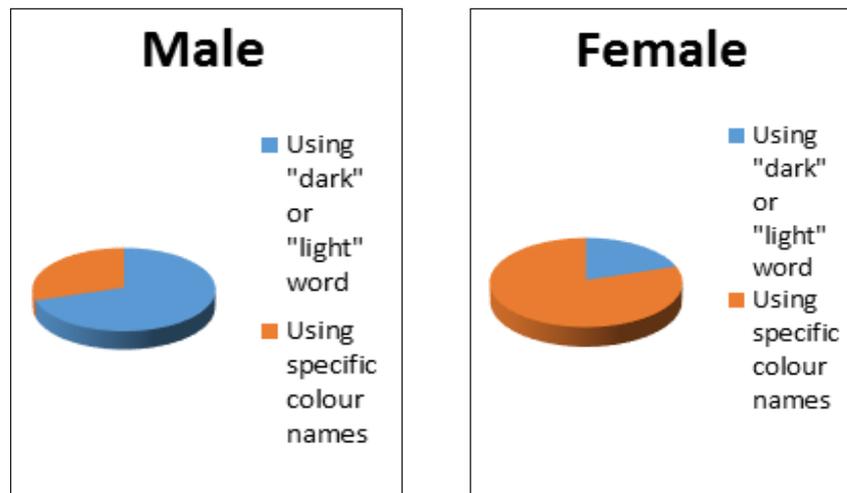
From question number seven with its three colour groups, we can shortly said that Lakoff's theory more or less can be applied in FIB UI English students. Over all, it can be calculated that female respondents have around 80% colour vocabulary while male respondents only has 20% of it. If this colour naming question is connected with the five previous questions about hobby and preference, I believe that those things affect to respondents' colour vocabulary. It is proven that respondents who prefer English movie and readings to Indonesian have more colour vocabulary than they who prefer the other way around. In addition, colour vocabulary which is had by respondents who are familiar with painting, designing, cosmetics, and fashion is also much more than they who are not familiar with those things. So, it means, one's colour vocabulary is not only determined by his/her gender, but there are also some social aspects which can affect one's colour name vocabulary.

CONCLUSION

Colour is one of important aspects in our life. Therefore, we were introduced to colours since we were a child, starting from basic colours to many specific colours. Whether we realize it or not, there are some colour vocabulary differences among male and female. These differences are also supported by Lakoff's theory which is "Women use more precise colour descriptors" (Weatherall, 2005, p. 58). Based on Lakoff's theory, I try to conduct a small research to prove whether it is applicable in FIB UI English students or not. Besides, by the end of this research, we can see if there is another aspect that can affect male's and female's colour vocabulary.

The result of this research is more or less similar to Lakoff's theory. From ten questionnaires that have been spread, five males and five females FIB UI English students, I can conclude that female's colour vocabulary is much more than male's. If it is calculated, it is around 80:20. It can be seen from the tendency of male uses "light" or "dark" to name colour without using more specific colour names like female does.

However, besides gender aspect, there are some other aspects that affect their colour vocabulary, for example, hobby, job, and so on. From this research, we can realize that a person who reads, watches, or listens to English more than Indonesia tends to have more colour vocabulary. Also, those who are familiar with painting, designing, fashion, and cosmetics tend to have more colour descriptors than those who are not.

Since this research is far from perfect, there are many chances for the next research to develop it to be much better. For the next research, researcher can add more aspects to be considered. Also, researcher can conduct a research to the wider areas with more samples to prove the theory. It is also possible to conduct this research in other languages to prove whether Lakoff's theory is also aplicable in non-English or not. The last advice for the next research is to conduct a research in another Lakoff's theory which is still connected to gender and language differences. Holmes (2001) cited Lakoff's theory about gender special lexicon, female's special lexicon is colour while male's special lexicon is anything related to sport. It is very interesting to see the other way around from this research. Since this research tries to see how different male and female in naming colour, the next research can try to see how different male and female in naming sport things.

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